

LANL completes excavation of 1940s waste disposal site

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Waste safely removed from 65-year-old site

LANL completed excavation of its oldest waste disposal site, Material Disposal Area B (MDA-B). The excavation removed about 43,000 cubic yards of contaminated debris and soil from the six-acre site. MDA-B was used from 1944-48 as a waste disposal site for the Manhattan Project and Cold War-era research and production.

The environmental cleanup work was funded by the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. "The completion of the excavation of MDA-B is a landmark for our Recovery Act projects and environmental cleanup efforts," said George Rael, assistant manager for Environmental Operations at the National Nuclear Security Administration's Los Alamos Site Office. To protect workers and the public, the excavation of MDA-B was performed

inside sturdy metal structures that resemble airplane hangars. The structures were equipped with fire and dust suppression systems and high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.

Excavation was monitored via closed circuit television and infrared sensors. “Our crews removed the waste from this 65-year-old disposal site safely and efficiently,” said Bruce Schappell, executive director of the Recovery Act projects at the Lab. “Safety for the public, the environment, and our workers was always our top priority.”

MDA-B consisted of narrow trenches up to 35 feet deep. Though most of the waste excavated from MDA-B was soil and run-of-the-mill trash, such as cardboard and protective clothing, items uncovered during excavation included the remains of two mid-1940s pickup trucks, nearly 30 inert artillery shells, and a calendar from 1946. The excavated waste was packaged appropriately and transported to disposal facilities.

“Work remains to be done at MDA-B, the completion of excavation is a real success story,” said Kevin Smith, manager of the National Nuclear Security Administration’s Los Alamos Site Office. “When the stimulus funded project is complete, the land will be available in the not too distant future for county reuse.”

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